

IS CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT ALREADY PAST?

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"EVEN now, after eighteen centuries of Christianity, we may be involved in some enormous error of which the Christianity of the future will make us ashamed." These words of the great Vinet of Lausanne will be echoed by many readers of Dr. Stuart Russell's fascinating work, "The Parousia," a book which is published by Mr. Fisher Unwin, and which, in the opinion of some, embodies the greatest theological discovery of the Christian era. Every student of scripture must be aware of the prominence given throughout the New Testament to the subject of our Lord's Second Advent. The fact that in the Epistles and the Revelation the event was predicted as being destined to take place in what was then, but in the nature of the case is now no longer, the near future, has been a source of grievous perplexity to many Christian people. At considerable cost to belief in the Divine authority and inspiration of the Apostles, these

LIMITATIONS OF TIME

are commonly ignored or explained away. But in "The Parousia," Dr. Russell clearly proves that unless in an utterly unwarrantable manner we are to assume that the words of Jesus are not to be understood in accordance with the usages of everyday life—a system of interpretation which brings theology into contempt by enabling us to read into Scripture just the meaning which fancy or prejudice may suggest—precisely similar limitations of time are assigned to the Second Advent by our Lord Himself throughout the four Gospels. Not twice nor thrice alone (Matt. x. 23; xvi. 27, 28; xxiv. 34) but many times over, the nearness of His personal and visible return to judgment is insisted on by Him in words of singular clearness and awful solemnity. The emphasis, the reiteration, and the variety of language by which the same meaning is conveyed make it certain as a matter of historical science that the gospel records truly represent His teaching on the subject.

In "The Parousia," Dr. Russell shows with a merciless logic that in Matt. xxiv. there is not a word nor a syllable about the end of the world. As may be seen from the margin of the Revised Version, it is the end of the age (*i.e.*, of the then existing Jewish dispensation), and the diffusion of the gospel through the Roman empire, which constituted the "world" of those days, that Christ speaks of. That the

great majority of the predictions recorded in Matt. xxiv. were realised in the events which preceded and accompanied the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is a matter of history—so much so, indeed, that some critics maintain that this prophetic discourse is not prophecy at all, but must have been written after that date. But truly viewed, the chapter establishes the superhuman foresight of Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of the great mass of the predictions becoming a reasonable guarantee for the fulfilment of the whole, including the prediction of verse 30. Dr. Russell thus boldly contends that

THE SECOND ADVENT WAS REALISED

by the personal and visible appearance of Jesus on the clouds of heaven at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Jewish dispensation which was inaugurated amid the terrors of Sinai being thus consummated by a scene of yet more awful grandeur and solemnity; and that this coming of Christ was accompanied by a translation of living saints of the first rank, by a resurrection and by a solemn judgment (mainly Jewish).

The silence of history as to these events is to be accounted for by remembering that the opening of a special spiritual sense in the beholder seems to have been at all times essential for the perception of Christ's Resurrection-body and of other real and objective things in the spiritual sphere. In the New Testament the Second Advent has a far narrower scope assigned to it than is commonly supposed. Those to whom the event was to bring deliverance and rest, by their being caught up to meet the Lord in the air, were the few faithful believers of the first rank who in that time of sad apostasy predicted to accompany the end of the Jewish age, still looked and longed for their Lord's return. Those to whom the event was to bring judgment and destruction were not the ignorant masses of the Gentile world, but mainly Jews, the open and avowed *enemies* of the cross of Christ—the murderers of the Saviour Himself and the cruel persecutors of His innocent followers. If Jesus appeared on the clouds of heaven in 70 A.D. both these sections of humanity *saw* Him; for both were intimately concerned in His appearance, but both immediately passed away from earth and could leave behind no record of what had happened! The Roman soldiers who were at

Jerusalem in 70 A.D. were neither the firm friends nor the inveterate enemies of Jesus. Being, therefore, unconcerned in His appearance they probably were

NOT COGNISANT OF HIS PRESENCE,

real and objective though that presence was. They thus resembled Saul's companions on the journey to Damascus (Acts ix. 7) who, being unconcerned in Christ's appearance on that occasion, heard a voice but *saw no man!* Throughout the world the Second Advent may have brought judgment and destruction to the enemies of the faith, for Josephus relates that the outbreak of the war in Palestine was the signal for the massacre of Jews everywhere. Throughout the world the few faithful Christians of the first rank may have been translated, being suddenly missing from their homes and their businesses in accordance with the express statement of Jesus in Matthew xxiv. 34, 40, 41, that such would be the case ere the generation of men to whom He spoke had passed away. Church history for many years after 70 A.D. is a complete blank, and these faithful Christians being comparatively few in number, and mostly occupying very humble and obscure positions in society, their disappearance would not be recorded by the secular historian, especially in that disturbed age.

As a specimen of masterly exposition "The Parousia" is of exceptional value. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the book is Dr. Russell's treatment of the Revelation, with the many striking parallels which he quotes from the historian Josephus. On the other hand, we venture to think that the work has some grave faults. The author seems to be scarcely aware of the many results of surpassing interest and importance which follow from the great truth he has done so much to establish, and he makes little or no attempt to answer the question, "If this view of the matter be true, *where are we now?*" And many, who joyfully accept his main argument, will greatly regret that although he believes in future retribution he yet fails to recognise those clear and emphatic predictions of a world-wide resurrection and a world-wide judgment yet to come, which are to be found in John v. 29 and Rev. xx. 12. Compare I. Cor. xv. 24, where in the Greek the word translated *then* is the same as the *afterwards* of the previous verse, and as in Mark iv. 28, indicates an interval of time,

